

Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
-----152304Z 054709 /70
O 152020Z FEB 77 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1787

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 1067

NODIS

FOR HABIB FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS R)
SUBJECT: SECURITY FOR SECRETARY'S BEIRUT VISIT

REF: (A) BEIRUT 0657, (B) STATE 033491, (C) BEIRUT 0686

1. SUMMARY: HAVE JUST HAD NINETY MINUTE MEETING WITH SHIHABI REVIEWING SECURITY FOR SECRETARY'S BEIRUT VISIT. AFTER DISCUSSION PRESS REPORTS OF PLOTS AGAINST SECRETARY, ASKED SHIHABI FOR HIS LATEST APPRAISAL OF SITUATION IN BEIRUT AND ASF ABILITY TO ASSURE SECURITY ON THE GROUND AND DURING LANDING AND TAKEOFF. IN BRIEF, SHIHABI SAID HE ANTICIPATED NO PROBLEM, THAT ASF IN COMMAND OF SECURITY SITUATION AND WOULD BE ON MAXIMUM ALERT TO ASSURE SAFETY OF SECRETARY AND HIS PARTY IN CONNECTION BEIRUT STOPOVER. "SYRIA IS ON GUARD AGAINST ANY SECURITY THREAT TO PARTY BE IT IN BEIRUT OR LATER IN DAMASCUS." END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER HEARING ORIGINAL KUWAITI PRESS REPORT ALLEGING UNCOVERING OF PLOT AGAINST SECRETARY, SHIHABI SAID THIS WAS TOTALLY ERRONEOUS VERSION OF CLASHES BETWEEN ASF AND FEDAYEEN IN BEIRUT WHICH BEGAN FEBRUARY 10. HE THEN FURNISHED
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DETAILED REVIEW OF INCIDENT WHICH, HE ASSERTED, ASF INTERROGATIONS SHOWED HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT UNDER IRAQI INSTIGATION BY PFLP IN COOPERATION WITH THE ANTI-GIBRIL FACTION OF THE PFLP-GC. IT WAS A STRAIGHTFORWARD ATTEMPT TO PROVOKE AND EMBARRASS SYRIA AND THE ASF.

3. THE INCIDENT STARTED WITH AN AMBUSH OF AN ASF PATROL

BY A SMALL MIXED FORCE OF PFLP, UNDER ABU AL-ABBAS, AND PFLP-GC UNDER ABD AL-RAHIM, FROM THE HOME OF LATE SPEAKER OF LEBANESE PARLIAMENT, SABRI HAMMADE, LOCATED ON THE AIRPORT ROAD NEAR CHITILA CAMP. FEDAYEEN CHOSE THIS SITE FOR AMBUSH BECAUSE THEY ENJOY A STRONG POSITION IN CHITILA IN CONTRAST TO THEIR WEAKER HOLD OVER NEARBY SABRA CAMP.

4. THE AMBUSH WOUNDED TWO ASF SOLDIERS. THOSE RESPONSIBLE FLED THE AREA BY CAR AS FURTHER ASF TROOPS ARRIVED. SHOOTING STARTED THEN FROM INSIDE CHITILA AGAINST THE REINFORCED ASF UNITS. THIS CONTINUED THROUGH THE FOLLOWING MORNING REACHING A PEAK ABOUT NOON. ONE ASF LIEUTENANT, SLIGHTLY WOUNDED IN THE HAMMADE HOUSE, WENT OUT TO AIRPORT ROAD SEEKING FIRST AID. HE WAS PICKED UP BY A VEHICLE OF THE PLO SECURITY FORCE (KIFAH MUSALLAHA AL-FALASTIN) WHICH WORKS CLOSELY WITH THE ASF. THE VEHICLE, HOWEVER, WAS DRIVEN BY A PFLP MEMBER WHO TRICKED THE LIEUTENANT AND DROVE HIM DIRECTLY TO CHITLA WHERE HE WAS KILLED AND HIS BODY SEVERELY MUTILATED.

5. ASF FORCES THEN RINGED CHITILA DEMANDING THAT THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ORIGINAL AMBUSH AS WELL AS THE KILLERS OF THE LIEUTENANT BE HANDED OVER. SIX ARE NOW IN SYRIAN CUSTODY, THREE OF WHOM HAD BEEN CAPTURED BY THE ASF, OTHERS DELIVERED AFTER PRESSURE FROM ASF CO COL. AL-HAJJ. SHIHABI SAID ASF STILL EXPECTED AT LEAST THREE OR FOUR MORE TO BE HANDED OVER.

6. I THEN MADE POINTS IN PARAS 1-3 STATE REFTEL. AT FIRST SHIHABI CONFINED HIMSELF TO SAYING THAT HE NEITHER HAD
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EVIDENCE OF ANY PLOT TO ATTACK THE SECRETARY OR HIS PART DURING THEIR STOPOVER IN BEIRUT NOR NEED WE FEAR FOR THEIR SECURITY. I THEN ASKED HIM POINT-BLANK IF HE FORESAW AN ORDER TO FORCE ENTRY OF THE PALESTINIAN CAMPS IN THE AREA OF THE MOTORCADE ROUTE BEFORE NEXT FRIDAY NIGHT. HE DID NOT DIRECTLY ANSWER BUT ASSERTED THAT NO INCIDENT WOULD BE ALLOWED TO OCCUR THAT WOULD CAUSE SECURITY DIFFICULTIES FOR THE SECRETARY'S VISIT. HE OBSERVED THAT THE PALESTINIANS OF SABRA AND CHITILA WERE NOW "SCARED TO DEATH," HAVING OBSERVED PREPARATIONS THE ASF LATELY HAD MADE AROUND THEIR CAMPS, WHICH HE ACKNOWLEDGED WERE NORMALLY A PRELUDE TO FORCED ENTRY. HE WOULD NOT BE MORE EXPLICIT BUT IMPLIED STRONGLY THAT ON THIS OCCASION THE PREPARATIONS WERE DESIGNED JUST TO INTIMIDATE THE CAMP INHABITANTS AND DRIVE HOME THE LESSON THAT NO AMBUSHES OR OTHER PROVOCATIONS OF THE ASF WOULD BE TOLERATED.

7. SHIHABI SAID THAT ARAFAT WAS BACK IN BEIRUT HAVING TRANSITED DAMASCUS EARLIER TODAY. HIS AIDE HAD TOLD HIM THAT

ARAFAT HAD TELEPHONED HIM FIVE TIMES THIS AFTERNOON. "HE PROBABLY THINKS I WAS TRYING TO AVOID HIM." (SHIHABI WAS OUT OF TOWN ALL DAY.) ARAFAT, HE TERSELY DESCRIBED AS FRIGHTENED AND NO LONGER ABLE TO EXERT LEADERSHIP.

8. COMMENT: I ASSUME BEIRUT WILL BE ABLE TO CHECK OUT DETAILS OF LAST WEEK'S INCIDENT AS RECOUNTED BY SHIHABI. I CONSIDER THAT ALTHOUGH OUR CONVERSATION DID NOT ELICIT HAS PRECISE TACTICS FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS OF ASF OPERATIONS VIS-A-VIS SABRA AND CHITILA CAMPS, WE HAVE GOTTEN THE FLATEST POSSIBLE ASSERTION THAT THE ASF WILL DO NOTHING THERE WHICH MIGHT CAUSE SECURITY DIFFICULTIES FOR THE SECRETARY'S VISIT.

9. TODAY'S SYRIAN RADIO BROADCAST TEXT OF ARAFAT'S TELEGRAM TO ASAD APPEALING TO PRESIDENT TO STOP EXECUTION OF REPORTED DECISION FOR ASF OPERATIONS AGAINST PALESTINIANS. FACT TELEGRAM WAS PUBLISHED HERE, I BELIEVE, SUPPORTS
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PRESUMPTION THAT NO MAJOR INCIDENT, SUCH AS FORCED ENTRY INTO CAMPS, IS IN THE WORKS FOR IMMEDIATE FUTURE.
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SECURITY, CAT-A, VISITS, PLOTS
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977DAMASC01067
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: P840086-0389, N770001-0550
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 77 BEIRUT 657, 77 STATE 33491, 77 BEIRUT 686
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 17-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3322829
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SECURITY FOR SECRETARY'S BEIRUT VISIT
TAGS: OVIP, OGEN, LE, US, (VANCE, CYRUS R)
To: JERUSALEM BEIRUT MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8346cec6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009